

bill. He wants to make it a top priority in order to prevent criminals from purchasing any type of gun. There is a procedure for it. He will, as President, instruct the Attorney General to target violent crime by making maximum use of Federal law to get dangerous gun using criminals off the streets and into prison. That is reminiscent of Operation Triggerlock—I assume that is exactly what we will have reinstituted again—which has been abandoned and turned down and discontinued by this President. There was an emphasis on the U.S. attorneys going after those who commit crimes using guns. There has been a noticeable dropoff in prosecutions for those crimes by this administration.

In conclusion, what does this action plan do? It provides a sound, sensible, thoughtful blueprint for coordinated Federal and State efforts to combat violent crime and reverse the current trends in the use of drugs that have led to so much violence in our society.

Mr. COVERDELL addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia is recognized.

Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, I thank the senior Senator from Mississippi very much for coming forward and speaking to this critical issue of crime and the tragedy it is causing across our country, and for highlighting these very targeted suggestions that we now have from Senator Dole to get at this core problem. I appreciate very much the Senator's remarks here this afternoon.

Senator JOHNSTON from Louisiana has just come on the floor. He has a very distinguished guest.

I yield 2 minutes to Senator JOHNSTON for the purpose of this introduction.

VISIT TO THE SENATE BY HIS EXCELLENCY JASSUM MOH'D AL-OWN, KUWAIT MINISTER OF ENERGY

Mr. JOHNSTON. Mr. President, I have the high honor of introducing to my colleagues here in the United States Senate the distinguished minister of energy from the country of Kuwait, His Excellency Jassum Moh'd Al-Own, who happens also to be a Member of the Parliament of Kuwait.

This is a very important time between our two countries. We have sealed the friendship between our two countries in battle, and that friendship persists, and will persist as long as there is a Kuwait and as long as there is a United States, which will be for many centuries, we all hope.

So, Mr. President, with a great deal of pleasure, I introduce to my colleagues the distinguished Minister of energy from Kuwait. [Applause.]

Mr. COVERDELL addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

CRIME IN AMERICA

Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, undoubtedly, Senator Dole's emphasis on taking crime head-on is an outgrowth of a circumstance over the last 3 years that has just turned sour on us. It has been alluded to, but I want to cite some of the facts that have developed in the last 36 months.

First of all, I want to make it clear that there can be no doubt about it that, in the last 36 months, the United States has found itself, once again, in a massive drug epidemic. It is fueling and will continue to fuel crime. Just to cite this, in the last 36 months, marijuana use is up 105 percent, LSD is up 130 percent, cocaine up 160 percent. Somebody in the administration suggested that, actually, drug use is down. I have no idea where that data is coming from, but it must be a single source, because every other source has documented that drugs were up in virtually every category. The sad thing, Mr. President, is that they are kids.

In the last epidemic, during the 1960's and 1970's, it was a target group from about 16 to 20. It has dropped, which is such a tragedy. Now the ensnarement is occurring at age 8 to 13. This country is going to feel the impact of that for a long, long time. One in every 10 kids is using drugs.

Drug prosecutions are down 12 percent. This administration cut 625 drug agents. Federal spending on drug interdiction has been cut by 25 percent. The drug czar's office was reduced by 83 percent. On the list of national security threats, compiled by the National Security Council, this administration moved illegal drugs from No. 3, as a threat, to No. 29 out of 29.

Now, Mr. President, can there be any wonder that our children are getting the wrong message, and that they no longer think drugs are a risk, and that, therefore, they are using them in record numbers, and that, therefore, we have an epidemic, and that, therefore, we are having the emergence of a new crime wave?

Mr. President, we have been joined by one of our colleagues that has been in the center of this controversy during his entire time, which is since 1994. The distinguished Senator from Michigan is already making an impact in this area of vital concern across our country.

I yield up to 15 minutes to the Senator from Michigan.

PRESIDENT CLINTON'S VETO BY LAWYERING

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Georgia, again, for his efforts to bring us together here to focus on various vital matters before the Senate and before the American people.

Mr. President, I have taken the floor on several previous occasions to discuss the problem of abusive prison litigation and this Congress' efforts to attack that problem.

The last time I did so was April 19, 1996. At that time, I expressed my disappointment that President Clinton

had just vetoed the Commerce-Justice-State appropriations bill.

Contained in that bill was the Prison Litigation Reform Act, a carefully crafted set of provisions designed to stem the tide of prison litigation.

In my view, this was a very important piece of legislation. Lawsuits by prisoners and lawsuits over prison conditions were completely out of hand.

One figure captures the situation very well. In fiscal year 1995, prisoners—inmates in prison—filed 63,550 civil lawsuits in our Federal court system. That is a little over one-quarter of all the civil lawsuits filed in Federal courts that year. It's also far more than the 45,788 Federal criminal prosecutions initiated that fiscal year.

In short, Mr. President, we saw, in fiscal year 1995, prison lawsuits outnumber prosecutions under our Federal system and account for one-quarter of all the lawsuits brought in this country in the Federal system.

One prisoner sued because he had been served melted ice cream. For this he claimed \$1 million in damages. Fortunately, the judge ruled that the right to eat frozen ice cream was not one of those the Framers of the Constitution had in mind.

Another sued because when his dinner tray arrived, the piece of cake on it was "hacked up."

A third sued demanding LA Gear or Reebok "Pumps" instead of Converse tennis shoes. This kind of abusive litigation is not only frivolous, it costs money and cost the taxpayers a lot of money.

The National Association of Attorneys General estimated that the States were spending about \$81 million to battle cases of the sort I just described—this even though the States win 95 percent of these cases early in the litigation for reasons that are obvious.

We were determined to do something about this problem in the Congress, so as part of the Commerce-State-Justice appropriations bill in 1996 we passed the Prison Litigation Reform Act. This legislation charged prisoners a fee for filing any lawsuit, while making it possible for the prisoners to pay that fee in installments. If a prisoner filed more than three frivolous cases, however, the prisoner would no longer be able to pay the filing fee in installments. He or she would have to pay the full fee up front, unless a court found this would create imminent risk of bodily harm.

In addition, prisoners who filed frivolous lawsuits would lose their good time credits, thus making their stay in prison longer. And judges were given authority to screen out frivolous cases on their own.

The legislation was designed to put an end to another aspect of the prison litigation problem: Seizure by Federal judges of the power to run prison systems. These seizures have consequences that range from the ridiculous to the disastrous.

In my own State of Michigan, judicial orders resulting from Justice Department lawsuits have resulted in